

TOWN OF HARPSWELL
COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Meeting of March 19, 2009
Approved Minutes

Committee Members Present: Alan M. Shaver
 David I. Chipman
 C.V. Noyes (arrived late)

Guest: Jay Somers
 Sr. Mgr., Government & Community Relations
 Comcast Cable

Town Staff Present: Kristi Eiane, Town Administrator
 Melissa Moretti, Recording Secretary

The meeting opened at 3:00 PM at the Harpswell Town Office, 263 Mountain Road, Harpswell, Maine.

The Minutes of the March 3, 2009 meeting were approved.

The matter of whether or not Comcast could provide the Town a map showing “cable plates” was discussed. Since the Town has GIS, a digital format of the map would be necessary to use for an overlay. It was suggested that Mr. Somers contact Carolyn Tukey, the Harpswell Town Planner, for details. Mr. Somers said he would also investigate the subject with the Brunswick office of Comcast, to see if such a map existed.

The subject of Channel 9 (the TV Guide channel) was discussed. Mr. Somers explained that Channel 9 was in the “lower tier” and, by eliminating it from the regular digital based signal lineup, bandwidth had been made available for Comcast to include two high-definition (“HD”) channels: WPME-HD and WPXT-HD, both from Portland. (He said there had been contractual obligations to the two additional HD channels.) He also mentioned there was a possibility of three or four more HD channels being added by the end of the year. In the case of a subscriber losing Channel 9, Mr. Somers said that Comcast may be willing to give the subscriber one year free usage of their digital converter box; he would know within a week or two. He also explained that the TV Guide channel was not considered by Comcast to be part of their basic lineup. It was clarified that, for a subscriber to receive HD channels, they must have an HD converter box; regular analog and digital channels could be received by a digital converter box.

Mr. Somers also volunteered to clarify with the FCC what constitutes “basic service”, i.e. over the air channels and access channels. He also said that Comcast wanted to “launch other products here”; not a TV product (he intimated it would be along the lines of a “triple play” option).

Mr. Somers said, since the Town is the regulator, he would check to see if our bill could be reduced since we lost a channel in the local lineup.

Regarding Harpswell Community Broadcasting Corp. (“HCBC”), Mr. Chipman said that Topsham, Bowdoin and Bowdoinham all receive Channel 14 via cable. HCBC has two access

channels; one broadcasts Brunswick Community Television. Mr. Somers said he would propose to Comcast that HCBC remain analog for now, and Comcast could try to find space for it on digital.

Regarding the Stevens Corner issue, Mr. Somers read an e-mail to the Committee that he had received from Kendall Blodgett, Project Coordinator for Comcast dated January 29, 2009. Mr. Blodgett had evaluated the area in question; however, he had included a road that should not have been addressed (Orion Point Way) when calculating the length of the road and the number, and addresses, of the houses that wanted cable service installed. Harpswell Tax Map 46 was produced for Mr. Somers to confirm the number of houses. He suggested he might invite Mr. Blodgett to the next scheduled meeting of the Communications Advisory Committee; in the meantime, Mr. Somers said he would get him a copy of the tax map so he could see the area in question and provide another cost estimate for the Town.

Capital requests were discussed – equipment for the Town Office meeting room, HCBC and the elementary school. Mr. Somers said he would check to see if that was built into the rate or put into a bill. He also said he would provide the Town a spreadsheet showing costs per subscriber.

Mr. Somers addressed the issue of the three fire departments; when one department was in a training session, other departments could observe via cable TV. He gave three options: via the access channel (the cheapest); point-to-point; and broadcast from the schools. He mentioned that a conference call format over the internet was too new, and would be too expensive. Mr. Somers was to confirm whether the fire departments had business speed (16 mg.) internet service.

The issue of polling, as mentioned in the Town's Franchise Agreement, had not been done yet, but Mr. Somers said that, within the next week or two it would be conducted by a marketing firm who would do random calling.

Mr. Somers also wanted to investigate whether the Town was rate regulated for Basic, or if we would need to refile with the FCC.

It was decided to schedule the next meeting with Mr. Somers after the result of the random polling could be made available.

It was reiterated that the Town's extension of their Franchise Agreement ran until the end of May. Mr. Somers suggested that, if the use of the model franchise agreement proposed by the State was agreed upon by all parties, it would be an easy matter to plug in specific information and the agreement could be implemented quickly.

The meeting adjourned at 4:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Moretti
Recording Secretary

